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DISARMAMENT FACT SHEETS

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FINAL DOCUMENT: PROGRAMME OF ACTION

The Final Document adopted by consensus at the special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament will be the main framework for United Nations and related disarmament pursuits in the coming years. The Programme of Action contained in the Final Document outlines measures needed to achieve nuclear and conventional disarmament. This Fact Sheet summarizes some of the Assembly's main recommendations.

NUCLEAR WEAPONS

The ultimate goal is "the complete elimination of nuclear weapons", which pose the greatest danger to mankind. Their use, the Assembly declared in 1978, would be "a crime against humanity".

A priority aim in the immediate future is agreement on a comprehensive nuclear weapon test ban. The Partial Test Ban Treaty of 1963 ended the atmospheric and underwater tests of the Soviet Union, United Kingdom and United States, but underground testing has continued and the other two nuclear-weapon Powers did not sign the 1963 Treaty. Since 1977 the Soviet Union, United Kingdom and United States have been holding negotiations on a comprehensive ban.

Other steps called for include:

- Cessation of the qualitative improvement and development of nuclear-weapon systems;

- Cessation of the production of all types of nuclear weapons and their means of delivery, and of the production of fissionable material for weapons purposes;

- Agreement on a "comprehensive, phased programme" for nuclear disarmament. Such a programme would seek the progressive and balanced reduction of stockpiles of nuclear weapons and their means of delivery, leading to their complete elimination. If possible, the programme should set agreed periods of time during which each phase of reductions would be carried out.

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- Effective arrangements to provide assurances to non-nuclear-weapon States that they will not be threatened or attacked with nuclear weapons. The nuclear-weapon Powers have made unilateral statements concerning their assurances to non-nuclear-weapon countries, but many UN Members would like the assurances to be put into legally binding form, perhaps through a treaty.

Non-Proliferation: It is imperative to prevent the proliferation of nuclear weapons, the Assembly said. At the same time, all States should be free to acquire technology, equipment and materials for peaceful uses of nuclear energy.

The Non-Proliferation Treaty of 1968 has been ratified by more than 100 countries which have undertaken not to receive, manufacture or otherwise acquire nuclear weapons. Some countries with nuclear potential, however, have not signed the Treaty.

Strategic Arms Limitation: The Assembly said the SALT II talks between the USSR and United States "should be followed promptly by further strategic arms limitation negotiations between the two parties, leading to agreed significant reductions, and qualitative limitations on strategic arms".

Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zones: Establishment of such zones constitutes an important disarmament measure. The Assembly encourages these efforts and calls upon the nuclear-weapon Powers to respect the nuclear-free status of such zones.

The main accord achieved so far is the Treaty of Tlatelolco prohibiting nuclear weapons in Latin America. Other zones where nuclear weapons have been banned by treaty are the Antarctic, outer space and the sea-bed.

The Assembly has called on all States to respect the continent of Africa and surrounding islands as a nuclear-weapon-free zone, in keeping with the Declaration on the Denuclearization of Africa adopted in 1964 by the Organization of African Unity (OAU).

Proposals also have been made for nuclear-weapon-free zones in South-Asia, the Middle East, Central Europe and the South Pacific, as well as for "zones of peace" in the Indian Ocean and South-East Asia.

CHEMICAL WEAPONS

The use of chemical and biological methods of warfare was outlawed by the Geneva Protocol of 1925, which the Assembly has repeatedly urged all States to ratify. The Geneva Protocol, however, did not ban production or stockpiling of such weapons.

For many years, the UN sought an agreement to ban both biological and chemical weapons. Eventually (1971) agreement was reached on a separate convention concerning only biological weapons -- a genuine disarmament treaty, because it calls for the actual destruction of existing weapons, as well as prohibiting their development, production and stockpiling.

The aim now is to take similar action in regard to chemical weapons. A major problem in negotiations has been the difficulty in verifying compliance with a ban on development and production. Bilateral negotiations between the United States and USSR, under way since 1976, have not yet produced a draft convention, but the two countries reported to the Committee on Disarmament in July 1979 that agreement had been reached on a number of elements.

The complete prohibition of development, production and stockpiling of all chemical weapons is one of the most urgent tasks for multilateral negotiations.

CONVENTIONAL WEAPONS

Recognizing that disarmament must involve not only nuclear but conventional armaments, the Assembly called for negotiations on the balanced reduction of armed forces and of conventional armaments, "based on the principle of undiminished security of the parties with a view to promoting or enhancing stability at a lower military level".

The world arms trade, in which a few countries supply weapons to a growing number of recipient countries, was also (for the first time) the subject of Assembly Action: It urged that consultations be carried out among major arms suppliers and recipient countries on the limitation of all types of conventional weapons.

The Assembly also convened a UN Conference to seek prohibitions or restrictions of the use of certain conventional weapons including those which may cause unnecessary suffering or have indiscriminate effects (such as napalm and incendiaries, mines and booby traps). The Conference session held in Geneva in September 1979 is expected to be followed by further efforts in 1980 to complete the drafting of agreements covering various types of weapons.

REGIONAL APPROACH

Regional agreements on arms limitation are viewed by the Assembly as one way to work towards general and complete disarmament on a global basis. Nuclear-weapon-free zones or zones of peace are examples of such initiatives. Other examples: the NATO-Warsaw Pact talks on mutual reduction of forces in central Europe, which began in Vienna in 1973; the Helsinki Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe, and the 1974 Declaration of Ayacucho subscribed to be eight Latin American countries which expressed the aim of creating conditions permitting effective limitation of armaments.

DISARMAMENT AND DEVELOPMENT

"The hundreds of billions of dollars spent annually on the manufacture or improvement of weapons are in sombre and dramatic contrast to want and poverty in which two thirds of the world's population live." the Assembly said. The "colossal waste" should be ended and resources released through disarmament should be used to help promote the well-being of all peoples. In view of the relationship between arms spending and the need for development resources, the Assembly has initiated a major study on the link between disarmament and development.

REDUCTION OF MILITARY BUDGETS

Gradual reduction of military budgets on a mutually agreed basis, particularly by nuclear-weapon States and other militarily significant countries, would help curb the arms race and increase possibilities for reallocation of resources.

Since Governments differ in their systems of reporting military expenditures, efforts are being made to develop standardized reporting which would allow international comparison of military budgets, thus providing data relevant to agreements on budget reductions. The Assembly has called for testing of a proposed reporting system.

October 1979.

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